

and he shot both of these brave officers. Tragically, Officer Shuping died at the scene. Thankfully, Officer Robinson is recovering at the hospital. Officer Shuping was just 25 years old—the same age as the officer we memorialized this week, Tyler Herndon.

I am just devastated by this. These brave officers had begun their careers in law enforcement and had nowhere to go but up. They were serving our community, and they were doing it with honor.

We talk a lot about the sacrifice given by law enforcement officers who day in and day out are serving our communities and putting themselves in harm's way, and it is dispiriting to think that these fallen officers, at the very beginning of their careers, have already made the ultimate sacrifice in the name of public safety and community safety.

Families in North Carolina and in each of our States are about to endure their first Christmas without their loved ones. We owe so much to these families whose parents, spouses, siblings, children, and grandchildren have given everything in the line of duty.

On Tuesday, when I spoke on Officer Herndon, I said that in the next Congress, I would be moving forward with the Protect and Serve Act again. This act increases penalties for people who murder or assault police officers. But in light of another police officer's death—the second one in a week in North Carolina, in the suburbs, just around the corner from where I live, 10 or 15 minutes away—I think we have to elevate the discussion now and send a very clear message to those who would harm police officers that if you do, then there are going to be dire consequences to pay for it. We owe it to the police officers to let them know that Congress cares about them. We should send this message.

This is a simple bill. It only focuses on those who are so brazen that they would murder a police officer in the line of duty, assault them, ambush them—all the things you have seen; now 48 murders in this year alone.

The best thing we can do is to pass this commonsense legislation and send a message to these people who are taking away the men and women serving our communities.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 4605 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, the Protect and Serving Act of 2020 that has been offered by my colleague and friend Sen-

ator TILLIS creates a new Federal crime that would punish assaults on law enforcement officers, including State and local officers, by up to 10 years and up to life if death results from the offense or the offense involves kidnapping, attempted kidnapping, or attempt to kill.

Let me say at the outset that I had a few seconds to communicate with my colleague before this official colloquy on the floor.

I say to the Senator, I sensed in your voice and what you told me how personal this is to you. This just isn't the killing of a law enforcement officer, which is a tragedy all of itself. It is your neighborhood. It is your community. As you said, some of these officers, you know their families, and it is very personal.

I want to say first, I offer my condolences to the families and colleagues of Officer Jason Shuping, who lost his life in Concord, NC, and Officer Tyler Avery Herndon, who lost his life in Mount Holly in the line of duty in North Carolina in the last few weeks. These are terrible tragedies.

We had a similar situation, of all places, in the Loop in Chicago just a couple of years ago—Commander Paul Bauer. What a spectacular man he was in service to the city of Chicago and the State of Illinois. He was murdered in the Loop. Unfortunately, his poor young family had to go through the ordeal not only of the funeral but also, then, of the trial of the suspect. I raise that only because Paul Bauer's assailant was successfully prosecuted by the State of Illinois and was given a life sentence just recently.

As is the case in most of these situations, to my knowledge, I would say to the Senator from North Carolina, every State, including his own, takes this very seriously and prosecutes cases of harm involving law enforcement officers.

The individual responsible for shooting Officer Shuping is dead. If he had lived, he would have been prosecuted for a capital offense in North Carolina. The individual who allegedly shot Officer Herndon has been indicted for first-degree murder in North Carolina.

So it raises the question, why is it necessary to create a Federal crime for something already being successfully prosecuted in every State in the Nation? Assaults on police officers are already criminalized with enhanced penalties, as they should be, and assaults on Federal officers are already Federal offenses. I have a lengthy list here, which I will not read to you, of all of the Federal statutes that already provide for punishment up to death and a life sentence for those Federal officers who would be shot or harmed in any way.

So let me say this to my friend and colleague from North Carolina: I thank you for standing up on the floor and bringing this matter to our attention. We should never overlook the fact that these men and women serve us self-

lessly and risk their lives in the process. It has happened here in the Capitol. It happens in every corner of America, sadly. But let's save this for another day. Let's take this up in the new Congress, which is about to start in just a few days. Let's address this issue, as well as the issue of how to make the plight of our law enforcement officers safer and more effective. To deal with issues involving that, I think, would be a balanced approach to this, which would serve justice.

For those reasons, I will object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I am obviously disappointed in the objection from my friend and colleague from Illinois, but I do believe that we have to start recognizing that something bad is happening—48 murders, hundreds of assaults, ambushes, premeditated attacks.

I do understand the idea that maybe you could prosecute it through existing law, your Federal or State law, but we have an epidemic of "abolish the police, defund the police," marginalizing the police, that suggests to me that even if there are pathways now to properly prosecute these brazen criminals, we have to cut through some of the rhetoric that, honestly, I believe is the responsibility for some of these unprecedented numbers of murders and assaults.

So although I am disappointed with the objection today, I look forward to working with my colleague on the Judiciary and others to do everything we can to pass the Protect and Serve Act and to send a very clear message to these increasingly less safe communities and more threatened law enforcement officers that we are going to do everything we can to make our communities safe and to make a police officer's job as safe as it can be.

Thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, there is a lot going on and not enough of some things we really need to go on going on.

But I think it is worth noting again—lest the moment be lost somehow in all the back and forth and all the chaos—that we have reached a watershed moment in the war against COVID-19.

As you know, the first successful vaccine was approved last week. I watched online as the Vice President of the United States and his wife received the vaccine. I applaud them for demonstrating their confidence, which should be all of our confidence, that this vaccine is not only effective but also safe.

In my State of Texas, it is estimated that there will be a million people vaccinated by the end of this month. That is a modern medical and logistical miracle.

Yesterday—the news keeps getting better—the FDA's expert advisory panel recommended the Agency approve a second successful vaccine, meaning millions more doses, over and above the Pfizer vaccine, could be headed out the door in a matter of days, if not hours.

The light at the end of the tunnel is getting bigger and brighter every day, but we are not out of the dark yet. As we know, tragically, more than 300,000 Americans have lost their lives to this virus. Millions have lost their jobs and their livelihood. Countless small businesses have permanently closed their doors, and the devastating impact of the virus across the country is growing day by day.

Earlier this year, we were able to come together in four separate pieces of legislation in a bipartisan—nearly unanimous—manner and respond with the sort of alacrity and speed and with the scope that I think our constituents expected us to. We didn't exactly know how big we needed to go. We just knew we needed to go big and we needed to go fast.

We appropriated more than \$3 trillion of coronavirus relief. We didn't know how long the virus was going to last. And when we tried to offer additional aid to the American people, unfortunately, the partisan dysfunction that sometimes creeps in—particularly, in the days leading up to a national election—prevented us from providing that relief.

But the election is over, and it is time for us to do our jobs. Really, we need to build on our past success.

The bills culminating in the CARES Act in March bolstered our healthcare response by making testing free of charge. Remember that used to be the watchword, what people would continue to say day after day after day: testing, testing, testing. You are not hearing that anymore because testing is ubiquitous.

We provided vital funding for hospitals and armed our medical workers with the personal protective equipment they needed to sustain this fight on the frontline. We poured funding into research and development of vaccines, therapeutics, and treatment. And by any measure, those efforts have been a success.

While, as I said, the number of people testing positive has gone up pretty dramatically, the death rate has remained much lower than it was in the early days of the virus. That is because, I believe, the treatments have improved, the therapeutics are working, and our healthcare providers are learning how to treat people with the virus in ways that are saving lives.

The work we did up through March buoyed the workers and families who needed the help with direct payments,

bolstered unemployment insurance benefits, and even gave the option to defer student loan payments with no penalty. We knew people needed help, and we acted responsibly, I believe.

We also supported our wobbly economy with the assistance for the Main Street businesses through the Paycheck Protection Program and loans for the industries that our States and Country rely on.

But as time has gone on, much of the funding provided by those bills has run out. As I said, we didn't know in March how long this was going to last, either the public health challenges or the economic challenges associated with it. But we have a better picture of what is needed now and we need to act and act soon—money for schools, vaccine distribution, and for airlines, which, through no fault of their own, are seeing their ridership plummet. They need help. Each of these are worthy of our best efforts to help.

Critical provisions that supported everything from unemployment benefits to the Paycheck Protection Program have already lapsed or are within just a few days of doing so. I know people wonder: Why does Congress wait so long, to the 11th hour to act?

Well, call it human nature, call it stubbornness, call it politics, call it what you will, but deadlines do force action, especially here in the Congress. I believe we are on the cusp of positive results for the American people.

For months now, disagreements on what the next relief bill should look like have stopped us from making progress. Unfortunately, I think it was more about the election and stoking the fears and anxieties of the American electorate in the run up to the election. I think that is what prevented us from passing additional bills after the CARES Act in March.

Then NANCY PELOSI and the House passed the Heroes Act, which everybody recognized—the mainstream media and even Democrats acknowledged—was not going to go anywhere. That was another \$3 trillion bill that helped the nascent marijuana industry, providing tax cuts to the wealthy people living in high-tax jurisdictions like New York and San Francisco. It was clearly not designed to pass, but rather to send a message.

Well, we knew we needed a targeted bill to send relief to those who needed it most, without driving up government spending even higher than necessary. Over these last several months, too much of the discussion has been focused on the areas where we disagree and, truthfully, there is no such thing as a perfect bill. You can always find a reason to say no.

But I don't believe that is the reason our constituents have sent us here. They want us to be responsible. They want us to be careful with their tax dollars, but they do want us to act in their best interests by trying to find ways to build consensus—even when we can't agree on everything, to at least

agree on the things we agree on. I think they expect us to do that.

We all understand that our workers and many people have had the rug pulled out from under them. They had no money coming in the front door. They are worried about paying the rent or mortgage. Their kids are at home going through virtual schooling. I mean, it is tough on a lot of people. It is not so tough if you are a Member of Congress and are receiving a paycheck. But for millions of our constituents back home, they have been waiting and waiting, and they have been hurting because we have not been able to get our act together.

The second round of the job-saving Paycheck Protection Program would help a lot. It would help our small businesses, throw them another lifeline. That was really one of the most popular parts of what we were able to do in March.

As the Presiding Officer will remember, we appropriated \$350 billion and it went in 2 weeks. So we appropriated another \$320 billion to provide loans to small businesses and incentives for them to maintain their payroll so people would have income and so that those small businesses, once we got the virus in the rearview mirror, would still be around and help rebound our economy.

In Texas alone, there were 417,000 Paycheck Protection loans—\$41 billion worth. The average loan was \$115,000; although, I was on a Zoom call with some in the Texas Bankers Association, and one of them told me that their smallest loan was \$300. I am sure there is an interesting story behind that. The point is this was needed help, and it has run out.

Then we need another investment in vaccine distribution. The logistical challenge of getting this vaccine around the country is mind-boggling, but we can see it is already working because of thorough planning and good execution, but they need more money to make sure that we get the job done. We also need to make sure that schools, particularly as people feel more comfortable going back to school in person, get additional support so they can bring the children back into the classrooms and keep them and the teachers and other employees healthy at the schools.

We know virtual learning has been a disaster, particularly for low-income students. Unfortunately, broadband is not universally available in the United States, and there are parts of my State wherein as many as a third of the students don't have access to broadband. So how in the world are they going to continue their educations? Local officials and State officials have tried to help, leaving parking lots outside of the school libraries available so you can drive up and gain access to the Wi-Fi from the schools, or they have distributed hotspots so that, if you get access to cellular service, you can actually tie into Wi-Fi and get online and

continue your studies. Yet, for many of our young people, these school lockdowns have been a disaster in terms of their educations. So we need to do more in that area as well.

Common sense tells us that, when you are sitting across the table, negotiating with somebody, if 80 percent of what you are talking about is agreed to, the process should move along pretty quickly because nobody gets 100 percent of what one wants around here. It is just not possible. While it is unfortunate it has taken us so long to reach this point, I am encouraged that maybe, just maybe—now with the deadline for government funding running out tonight at 12 midnight—this is forcing action and that a deal is in sight.

There has been more bipartisan cooperation and communication over the last several days than there has been in the last several months. A lot of people have put a lot of effort into this on a bipartisan basis, and now the decision is with what we call the “four corners”—rank-and-file Members of the House and Senate. We are not going to have a chance to amend this deal. It is going to be proposed by Speaker PELOSI, Democratic Leader SCHUMER, Leader MCCARTHY, Majority Leader MCCONNELL, and the White House. So I am sure it is not going to be perfect. Unfortunately, we will not have a chance to make it better. I hope the partisan divisions that have paralyzed Congress for much of the year do not rear their ugly heads in these final hours and at this critical stage of negotiation.

There is too much at stake for us to go home for the holidays emptyhanded. There are too many people who are hurting, too many people who are anxious. The number of people having overdosed by self-medicating since the virus hit is, I think, about 80,000, I read. You can imagine people self-medicating, whether it is with alcohol or drugs or people who are trapped with an abuser, either a spousal abuser or a child abuser. Because they are not going to school, their teachers can't look for signs of that abuse and get them help. Reports of child sexual abuse are down 40 percent. It is not because it is not happening; it is because kids aren't in school, where teachers and others can come to their aid.

I can only imagine a single mom, say, with three kids of different ages at home, trying to continue their educations, but she is worried: How do I keep working—maybe she is an essential worker—so she can pay the bills to put food on the table and pay the rent. Can you imagine the chaos and stress?

There is too much at stake for us to go home for the holidays emptyhanded. We need to remember we are not here for our benefit; we are here for the benefit of the people we are honored to represent—in my case, 29 million Texans. We have a fiduciary responsibility. We are in a position of trust. They have entrusted us with their welfare.

The American people have waited long enough. We can't let them down again. We are on the 5-yard line, and we need to deliver. We need to get this done and get this done soon.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 8428

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we had a hearing this week, the Immigration Subcommittee of Senate Judiciary, and Senator BLUMENTHAL was there with me and others. We listened to people from Hong Kong tell the story of what is happening because of the repressive regime in Beijing and what is happening to those in Hong Kong who are demonstrating in favor of democracy.

This hearing on the crisis in Hong Kong also raised a lot of questions about the United States and our own immigration and refugee policy toward those who are being persecuted.

At the hearing, there was some powerful testimony. I recall one of the witnesses, Mr. Chu, who said that he was aware of students—Chinese students—currently in the United States who have already been designated as enemies of the state by China and who, if they are forced to return to China, will face prosecution, imprisonment, and who knows. It was a very personal story because these people are friends of his who, through no fault of their own, only speaking out against the regime in Beijing, now will face long prison sentences if forced to return to China.

I am amazed, as I meet these people from China and Hong Kong, at the courage they show. Mr. Chu, for example, had come to the United States—been sent to the United States by his father at the age of 12 because his father had made a practice of helping the Chinese who had demonstrated on Tiananmen Square and providing the equivalent of an underground railroad for them to escape China. I guess the people in Beijing were on his heels, and so to protect his family, he sent his 12-year-old son to the United States, who has lived here for a number of years. He is an American citizen now.

This repression and the Chinese Government meddling in the lives of the people of Hong Kong are appalling. Thousands of protestors in Hong Kong have been persecuted for fighting for the liberties that we Americans routinely say we enjoy—freedoms of assembly and speech, the right to vote, due process, and the rule of law.

The national security law imposed on Hong Kong by the Chinese Communist Party in June has enabled the ruthless abuse of protesters, political leaders,

journalists, and teachers. Despite its name, the national security law is not about security; it is about fear—fear of the voices in Hong Kong calling for reform of democracy and freedom.

I believe my colleagues on both sides of the aisle share my feelings about the crisis in Hong Kong, but the question today is, What are we willing to do about it?

Last week, on a unanimous voice vote, the House of Representatives passed the bipartisan Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act, which would grant temporary protected status to Hong Kong residents currently in the United States and provide an opportunity for refugee status to Hongkongers facing persecution.

At Wednesday's Judiciary Committee hearing, we received a clear message: Congress needs to pass the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act in the Senate now. We can do it. In fact, we can do it today. Think about the message it would send from the United States to Hong Kong and to the world if we sent this bill to the President's desk to be signed into law. It is bipartisan. It was unanimous in the House. It is timely, and it addresses a real problem.

Under the bill, Hong Kong would be designated for TPS for 18 months. To qualify for TPS status, eligible Hongkongers currently in the United States would need to first clear a criminal history and national security screening and pay a \$360 filing fee.

Some of the critics have said: We can't trust the Chinese in the United States. They may be spies.

That is why we require, under the TPS, that anyone applying for this TPS status has to go through a criminal background check and a national security screening.

I want America to be safe—we all do—but just to categorically say “If you are from China or from Hong Kong, you are a suspicious character, and we don't want you to stay here” isn't fair. It isn't realistic.

Sixty-seven hundred students are here now legally in the United States from Hong Kong and China, and they were admitted to the United States under standards and investigations. They are students at our universities, and they would qualify for this important temporary humanitarian protection so that they aren't forced to return to a literally dangerous situation.

TPS can be granted by the President if he wishes, but the Trump administration has failed to protect Hongkongers in need.

This bill also establishes expedited refugee and asylum access for qualified individuals and their family members. This would enable persecuted Hongkongers to register with any U.S. Embassy or Consulate, or with the Department of Homeland Security if they are in the United States.

Refugees and asylees would be required to meet all legal requirements and pass background checks before

being granted status in the United States. That is just not a minor administrative chore. We are serious about it. If you want to come to the United States as a refugee or asylee, we will do everything we can to make certain that you are no danger to anyone in the United States.

The refugee policies of this outgoing administration have put at risk Hongkongers who are fleeing Chinese persecution, not to mention millions of other vulnerable refugees. Since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States has resettled on average of 80,000 refugees a year. That is our annual average since 1980. However, in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in history, the current Trump administration has set record low refugee admissions figures for 4 years in a row, culminating in the lowest levels in history this year at 15,000—from 80,000 to 15,000.

How many refugees has the United States admitted from Hong Kong in the last year? Zero—not one.

When you look at what the Communist Chinese Party is doing in China, threatening these demonstrators who are marching in the streets for things that we say over and over are the underpinnings of our democracy, and to think that we have not granted one single person in Hong Kong refugee status is hard to imagine. The Trump administration has decimated legal protections for Hongkongers and other innocent victims of persecution.

For example, under the rule issued last week, Hongkongers could be denied asylum if they transit other countries on the way to the United States, if persecutors detain them for only a brief period, or if persecutors were not able to carry out their threats before the activist fled.

According to the testimony of the Hong Kong Democracy Council executive director, Samuel Chu, on Wednesday—I mentioned him earlier—the people most immediately at risk in Hong Kong are the approximately 10,000 individuals who have been arrested by the Chinese Government crackdown.

Make no mistake. We know what the Chinese Communist Party is up to. As for these concentration camps—they call them reeducation camps—that they created for the Uyghurs, we know what they are doing. They characterize them in many different ways, but we have seen this throughout history. The question is, What are we going to do about it?

We are going to protest what is happening to the people in Hong Kong, but will we take one step—even one small step—to provide them security and safety?

Not all of them are going to wish to leave Hong Kong, I understand that. Some of them can't. Some of them may receive assistance from another country. The British Prime Minister has offered a path to citizenship to up to 3 million Hongkongers eligible for over-

seas passports. The Australian Government has stepped in with visa options for students and workers from Hong Kong. Canada announced multiple new immigration measures supporting Hong Kong residents, including measures to help Hong Kong students in Canada.

I have a basic question. What are we going to do? You hear this about the British stepping up, the Australians stepping up, the Canadians stepping up. Where is the United States?

This is our chance today. Senator BLUMENTHAL is going to make a unanimous consent request to actually have the United States do something.

One country cannot take in all the refugees from Hong Kong nor should it be expected to, but surely the United States of America, the most powerful nation on the Earth and, we hope, a model for democracy in the world, cannot protest what is happening to the innocent people of Hong Kong and the repressive regime of Beijing and then do nothing.

Passing the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act is urgently needed. The situation continues to deteriorate. We need to do it and do it quickly. We need to protect Hongkongers in need. Think about the message that it sends to the world if the United States agrees with Senator BLUMENTHAL's request today and passes the measure that has already passed the House of Representatives and it becomes the law of the land. How will the Chinese Government pass that off as insignificant, when all of these countries are basically saying their treatment of the people of Hong Kong is abominable?

We should act quickly. The Senate Judiciary Committee has failed to raise another bill, the Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act, sent to it 6 months ago. So they have had their opportunity in the committee to do something. Under the Democratic majority, the House did their job and acted quickly with a bipartisan bill.

We have seen a lot of speeches on both sides of the aisle about how mad we are at the Chinese Government. The question today, in the next few minutes, is, Are we mad enough to do something?

Do something significant. I ask the Senate to join the House in passing the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act now. Let's send this bill to the President and send a strong message to the people of Hong Kong that they are not in this alone.

How fortunate I am to have a colleague like Dick Blumenthal. We see eye-to-eye on this issue. He jumped on the measure and said he wanted to move on it, and I thought, darn, I wish I would have been the first one, but I am happy to accompany him on this effort.

I sincerely hope that this is truly bipartisan. If our protest against the Communist Party of China is meaningful and bipartisan, it will be powerful.

I yield to my colleague, Senator BLUMENTHAL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am really honored to follow Senator DURBIN, a staunch and steadfast champion of refugees and immigration reform who, year after year, has shown the courage to stand up on this issue.

And to emphasize a point that he has made, there is an urgency to our acting. There is a sense that time is not on our side for the lives at stake here. The world has watched in horror as China has cracked down on the incipient democracy movement in Hong Kong. We have seen the yellow umbrellas. We have seen the marchers in the streets and the brutality and the cruelty of the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese authorities, using clubs and guns with the kind of thuggishness that has come to characterize the Chinese anti-democracy movement there and around the world. We have an opportunity to take a stand and speak out and do something in defense of the brave protesters who are risking their lives.

We have seen this kind of democracy movement before. We know it is in the great tradition of our country to stand with those protestors and those marchers who are saying to the Chinese Government: We will not let you break the agreement that you did in 1984 with the United Kingdom to preserve these freedoms and to make Hong Kong an outpost of democracy in the repressive regime of China. We will not let you chip away at our rights or extradite our people to China. That law was the spark that ignited these protests. We will not let you mock our demand for freedom and democracy.

The Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act of 2020 was passed unanimously in the House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support, and it would very simply give those protesters protective status in this country, the greatest Nation in the history of the world, saying to them: We will give you a safe harbor. We will give you a place where you can be protected.

And remember, what the Chinese are saying is: You can be indicted. You can be arrested. No matter where you are in the world, if you violated our law, we will bring you back.

And we would say to those protestors who are simply demanding fundamental freedoms that often we take for granted here: We will give you protective status. We will give you temporary protective status right away. We will make sure that you have that safe harbor.

Now, I know that my colleagues, Senators Rubio and Menendez, have a bill that is actually called the Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act. We had a hearing on it the other day in the Judiciary Committee. All of my colleagues expressed support for the individuals who came to us asking us to act on that measure.

The Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act of 2020, in fact, would go beyond that measure, only to say that you don't have to be formally charged in China and you don't have to be in specific categories of protestor. You can be a journalist, and you can get temporary protective status. It would also say that you don't have to demonstrate individually a fear of persecution, but you do have to be screened. You do have to demonstrate that you are not going to be a national security threat.

My colleague Senator DURBIN is absolutely right to make this point. Nobody wants Chinese spies in this country. There would be a background check and a screening just as there are for other refugees under this measure.

The other day, at this hearing, we heard from Samuel Chu and Nathan Lau and we heard from Joey Su. These activists are fighting for their freedom. We heard their stories, so powerful and moving. Their faces and voices should be heard and heeded in this body.

We are far removed here in this senate setting from the clamor and the cruelty of those streets in Hong Kong, where men and women have stood bravely against the physical brutality and force of the Chinese regime. But we should send a message to the world: We are going to stand with those refugees who come here heeding the lady who stands in New York Harbor with a message of hope and freedom. The same lady who many of our forebears in this Chamber saw when they came to this country—like my dad, in 1935, at the age of 17, alone, seeking to escape persecution in Germany, speaking no English, knowing virtually no one, having not much more than the shirt on his back but believing—believing—that America would offer him the safety of freedom as a refugee.

That is our tradition in this country. It goes beyond party, geography, race, or religion. It is what makes America truly great. We are a nation of immigrants and refugees, and my hope is, as I stand here, that we will have the same unanimity in this body as the House did, despite all the other divisions that persist at this point; that we will have the respect for the moral imperative to act now and make sure that we fulfill the message of America now that is more important than ever before in light of the repressive regimes, even in our own region, whether it is Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, where we can say to the world: We are going to stand by our principles, and we are going to do it now because of the urgency of this moment and the need of these refugees for temporary protective status.

Let us act now.

So, Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 8428, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and

passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, today, we have good news and bad news. The good news is that our Democratic colleagues are finally discovering that the Chinese Communists are not our friends. They are finally acknowledging that the Chinese Communists are murdering, torturing, oppressive tyrants, and our Democratic colleagues are likewise discovering that Hong Kong is a beacon for democracy and a beacon for liberty. That is, indeed, good news.

The bad news is, the bill that they have put forth is not designed to do anything about it. This is not a Hong Kong bill. It is, instead, a Democratic messaging bill because House Democrats made, I think, a cynical decision to try to exploit the crisis in Hong Kong to advance their longstanding goals of changing our immigration laws.

It is not news to anyone who has been watching the political battles of recent years to discover that our Democratic colleagues embrace open borders; that when it comes to illegal immigration, their preference is to make all immigration legal. This bill advances that longtime partisan political agenda that the Democrats have.

When it comes to standing up for Communist China, for 8 years I have led the fight in this Senate to stand up to Communist China. China is, I believe, the single greatest geopolitical threat facing the United States for the next century.

In October of last year, I traveled to Hong Kong as part of a friends and allies tour throughout Asia, met with the Hong Kong dissidents—those brave, young students standing in the streets, standing for freedom, and standing up against Chinese tyrants. I did a satellite interview on an American Sunday show from Hong Kong dressed in all black in solidarity with those protesters because Hong Kong today is, as I have said many times, the new Berlin. It is the frontline in the battle against Communist tyranny.

This bill, however, is not designed to fix that problem. Right now, today, under current law, individuals in Hong Kong are already eligible to become refugees under our immigration law. In fact, in July, President Trump explicitly expanded the number of refugee slots available and allocated them to Hong Kong. This bill, instead, is designed and would dramatically lower the standards for both refugee and asylum status to the point where individuals would qualify even if they cannot establish an individualized and credible fear of persecution.

The Senator from Connecticut just listed that as a virtue of this bill—that no longer would you have to establish a credible fear of persecution; instead,

this bill would dramatically lower that standard. There is no reason to lower that standard, and there is particular risk when doing so, we know, would be used by the Chinese Communists to send even more Chinese spies into the United States.

The Senator from Connecticut assured us: Well, don't worry. We will do a background check.

Well, the last I checked, when the Chinese Communist Government sends spies into our country, they are quite willing to concoct a bogus background portfolio of materials. Who do you think the Chinese Government would be seeing coming in? We just recently had news of Chinese spies targeting Members of Congress—targeting prominent Democrats. This is an espionage threat America faces of our adversaries taking advantage of our laws and targeting our leadership.

The truth also is that China has confiscated passports and, I am told, stopped issuing exit visas to persons deemed problematic. As a result, China is highly unlikely to let actual dissidents leave Hong Kong, so this bill isn't directed to help them.

But I will say this: We urgently need to have a real, substantive, bipartisan conversation about countering the Chinese Communist Party, about defending the United States of America, about standing up and winning this battle. This bill doesn't advance that objective, but what I am going to do is I am going to give our Democratic colleagues the opportunity to actually support legislation that would stand up to China.

So, momentarily, I am going to ask unanimous consent for one bill and discuss a second bill that I also later intend to ask unanimous consent to pass. But first, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I really regret this attack on a bill that was passed unanimously—Republicans, unanimously, and Democrats, unanimously—a bipartisan bill by the House of Representatives. If my colleagues are serious about moving a bill to the desk of the President, only this bill will do it because only this bill has been passed by the House of Representatives.

There is an urgency to this cause for the sake of these refugees who haven't been permitted to leave their country, haven't been sent by China, haven't simply come into this country as potential espionage agents. They have come here because they fought for freedom in their country. So to say that we have discovered that we need to stand up to China, sorry about that, but it is just preposterous.

Mr. DURBIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I yield to the Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I would ask the question through the Chair. Isn't it true

that this bill that we are promoting, which just passed the House unanimously on a bipartisan basis, also protects the 6,700 students here in the United States with student visas from being forced to return to Hong Kong when our State Department is warning Americans it is unsafe for them to travel to Hong Kong? Is that not true?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. The Senator from Illinois is absolutely right, and I was just going to, as a matter of fact, make that point because I think it is central to the objection that has been raised.

In fact, the people in danger here are already here. They are in danger if they are sent back, as they would be without that temporary protected status. So that point, I think, refutes, essentially, the argument that has just been made by our colleague from Texas.

Mr. DURBIN. If the Senator would yield further for a question—and this notion that the Chinese in the United States are all suspect spies, is it really—is that the point you want to make? Is that really the point you want to make? Do we have background checks involved here? Do we have screening involved here?

We are all intent on keeping America safe, but to categorize a group of people as all potential spies—and, therefore, they are going to all be fed to the lions of Beijing if they are returned—seems to me to be fundamentally unfair and not consistent with what America has learned about immigration. There were suspicions in World War II about all those people coming from Europe, and they were turned away, many of them to their death. We can't make that mistake again. If there is any suspect person, there is a way to determine that with screening, criminal background checks, and the like.

So the 6,700 who are here, we were told at the hearing—I think you were there; it may have been a minute or two before you arrived—one of them is a student of Georgetown, for example, who now has a price on his head from the Chinese Communist Party, and the question is whether we are going to force him to return into imprisonment. I don't think we want anyone who is suspected of spying on the United States at all, but to dismiss all of these people as possible spies doesn't sound to me—does it sound to you?—as consistent with who we are as a people.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. To answer the Senator from Illinois very directly, it is totally antithetical to the principles of democracy in the United States of America. It is totally abhorrent to the values of our constitutional Nation, and it is, frankly, absurd.

Here we are, according to my colleague from Texas, standing up and being tough on China, and we are doing what? We are sending back their opponents so they can imprison them and kill them? That is the notion of being tough on China—to enable them to im-

prison and kill their political opponents?

I ask my colleague from Texas to rethink the practical implications of this measure and to consider why the House of Representatives unanimously passed this. It doesn't lower the standards for political refugees coming to this country. It doesn't eliminate any security checks. It takes people, many of them living here already—not spies, by any means—and sends them back to the meat grinder of the repressive Chinese Communist Party. It may sound like good rhetoric to oppose this bill, but my colleague from Texas heard the testimony of these freedom fighters and why they need temporary protected status and why they support a safe harbor.

So I continue to insist that this bill, like the Rubio-Menendez bill, protects essential American values, and I ask him to reconsider his objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3835

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, my colleague from Connecticut just said that they were being tough on China. As I explained, this bill is not being tough on China.

But a bit of good news: They will have the opportunity, moments from now, to in fact be tough on China. I have introduced, roughly, a dozen separate pieces of legislation designed to do exactly that, to stand up to the Chinese Communist Government. I am glad also to see my Democratic colleagues discovering the human rights travesties that are playing out in China.

Look, my family knows the oppression of Communist governments. My father was imprisoned and tortured in Cuba. My aunt, my Tia Sonia, was imprisoned and tortured by Fidel Castro's thugs. So, when it comes for standing for dissidents, there is a reason why, for 8 years, I have gone to the Senate floor over and over and over again speaking up for dissidents who are being tortured and oppressed by Communists. Here is a chance for the Democrats to join us in that regard.

Mr. President, there are two separate bills that I have introduced that I am going to discuss. The first is a bill called the SCRIPT Act.

For years, we have known that China's surveillance state and censorship practices are used to maintain its human rights violations. And what this devastating pandemic has shown us is that China's surveillance state and its censorship practices are also profound threats to our national security, to our public health, and to our public debate, as the Chinese Government hid information about the COVID-19 pandemic that began in Wuhan, China, hid it for months on end and allowed millions across the globe to be threatened—their lives and health and safety to be threatened.

In addition to their espionage activities, the Chinese Communist Party in-

vests billions into spreading propaganda, even using American media outlets, telecommunication infrastructure, movies, and sports teams to spread their propaganda, from buying media outlets so that they broadcast propaganda into America to coercing Hollywood studios and sports leagues to self-censor by threatening to cut off access to one of the world's largest markets. The Chinese Communist Party spends billions and billions of dollars to mislead Americans about China and to try to shape what we see, what we hear and think.

All of these activities are part of China's whole-of-state approach to amass influence around the world through information warfare, and we need to stand together to stop it.

That is why I will be momentarily asking for unanimous consent on the SCRIPT Act, which would cut off Hollywood studios from the assistance they currently receive from the U.S. Federal Government if those studios allow the Chinese Communist Government to censor what they are producing.

We have seen this pattern over and over and over again—Hollywood being complicit in China's censorship and propaganda in the name of bigger profit. "Bohemian Rhapsody," a wonderful biography of Freddie Mercury and story of the band Queen—well, the Chinese Government was upset that Freddie Mercury was homosexual and demanded that Hollywood censor scenes that showed that Freddie Mercury was homosexual. And Hollywood—those great, woke social warriors that they are—compliantly said: We are more interested in the money than in artistic integrity, than in telling Freddie Mercury's story, so the Chinese Government will happily edit out those scenes.

"Doctor Strange," another movie—comic book movie—in "Doctor Strange," they changed the Ancient One's character from being from Tibet, which is how it is portrayed in the comic book, to Celtic because, you know, the Chinese Communist censors, they don't want to recognize Tibet—another area that has been subject to persecution and oppression from China—and Hollywood meekly complied.

In the sequel to "Top Gun," the back of Maverick's jacket—if you remember the first "Top Gun," maybe the greatest Navy recruiting film ever made—you find the Taiwanese flag and the Japanese flag. The Chinese censors didn't like that, and so Hollywood meekly removed the flags. What does it say to the world when Maverick is scared of the Chinese Communists?

I would point out, unfortunately, the Chinese censorship is being carried out by Hollywood billionaires who are getting richer in the process.

In recent days, it has been reported that one of Joe Biden's top potential choices to be Ambassador to China is the former CEO of Disney, who happens

to be a major Democratic donor. Disney just came out with the movie “Mulan.” In the movie “Mulan,” which the director described as “a love letter to China”—well, this love letter wasn’t subtle because right in the credits at the end of “Mulan,” they thanked oppressive government forces that are running concentration camps right now, with over 1 million Uighurs imprisoned. Disney gleefully thanked the jackbooted thugs who are carrying out torture and murder, and apparently the leader of that effort is one of the top candidates to be America’s Ambassador to China.

The Senator from Illinois and the Senator from Connecticut said: “We need to stand with people who are oppressed.” I agree.

Look, Hollywood could say whatever they want, but there is no reason the Federal Government should facilitate their censorship on behalf of the Chinese Communists. The SCRIPT Act says: If you are going to let the Chinese Communists censor your movies, you are not going to get access to the jet planes and to the ships and all the different material of the Federal Government that are used in movies.

Moments ago, the Senator from Connecticut said they want to be tough on China. Well, we are about to see how tough they are on China.

Mr. DURBIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. CRUZ. I will happily yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN. Can you tell me, if you are successful and if you hit Hollywood hard, how that provides any solace to the 6,700 Hong Kong students in America who are facing deportation back to prison in China?

Mr. CRUZ. The Senator from Illinois asked a question. Let me tell you how it provides solace—because people who are in hell holes, they listen to what we are saying. People who are in hell holes, they hear the voice—you know, some time ago, I had the chance to sit down with Natan Sharansky, the famed Soviet dissident. He and I sat down and visited in Jerusalem. Natan told me about how, when he was in a Soviet gulag, that in the cells, from cell to cell, they would pass notes: Did you hear what Ronald Reagan said? The Soviet Union is an evil empire. Marxism-Leninism will end up on the ash heap of history. “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

And I will tell you how people here—because if the Senator from Illinois will remember, I introduced legislation to rename the street in front of the Chinese Embassy in the United States “Liu Xiaobo Plaza,” after Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace laureate who was—let me finish answering your question. If you want to propound a second one, I am happy to answer that one too. Liu Xiaobo was the Nobel Peace laureate wrongfully imprisoned in China. And the strategy of renaming the street in front of the Embassy is the strategy Reagan employed renaming the street

in front of the Soviet Embassy “Sakharov Plaza.”

Twice I stood on this floor seeking unanimous consent, and twice a Democrat—the senior Senator from California—stood up and objected. At one point, the senior Senator from California said: Well, if we do this, it will embarrass the Chinese Government.

I responded: You are understanding correctly. And that is not a bug; it is a feature. That is the purpose.

Let me tell you what happened to that. Twice, Democrats objected to the legislation. I then placed a hold on President Obama’s nominees to the State Department.

The Obama administration came to me and said: How could we move these nominees forward? How could we move them forward?

I said: It is very simple. Pass my legislation, and I will lift the hold.

The Democratic caucus didn’t like that, but they ultimately agreed. So the legislation I introduced to rename the street in front of the Chinese Embassy “Liu Xiaobo Plaza” passed this body unanimously.

Ultimately, the House didn’t take it up and pass it, but I will tell you how that story ends. That story ends in 2017 when I was sitting down with Rex Tillerson for breakfast in Foggy Bottom—the new U.S. Secretary of State. When he spoke to his Chinese counterparts, he said: They have come back and said that among their top three diplomatic objectives with us is to stop your bill to rename the street in front of the Embassy. They are terrified by the sunlight and sunshine on the dissidents.

At the time, Liu Xiaobo had passed, but his widow, Liu Xia, was still in China, still wrongfully held back. I told Secretary of State Tillerson: I will tell you what. You tell the Chinese that if they release Liu Xia, if they let her get out, I will stop pressing this particular bill. If they don’t, I will keep pressing it, and we will pass it again because we have already done it.

Within weeks, China released Liu Xia.

So you ask, how does this help the people in prison? By not having Hollywood media moguls spreading Chinese propaganda.

But let me give you a second choice, very directly. Do you want to know how people are helped? It is a second bill called the SHAME Act, which, if our Democratic colleagues want to be tough on China, we could pass right now.

What does the SHAME Act do? The SHAME Act focuses in particular on human rights atrocities. It focuses on over 1 million Uighurs in concentration camps and other religious minorities and the Falun Gong practitioners who are captured and murdered and whose organs are harvested. And the Chinese Communist Party engages in yet another horror.

My Democratic colleagues like to say on the question of abortion that they

are pro-choice. Well, the Chinese Communist government right now is engaging in forced sterilizations and forced abortions, taking Uighur mothers and forcing them to abort their children against their will.

Whatever the Democrats’ views on abortion in the United States as a matter of a woman’s choice, surely they must be united in saying that a government forcing a woman to abort her child, to take the life of her unborn child, is an unspeakable atrocity.

So the SHAME Act does something very simple: It imposes sanctions on the Chinese Communist government leaders responsible for implementing this horrific, 1984-style policy of forced sterilizations and forced abortions.

I had intended to seek unanimous consent for the SHAME Act as well, but my Democratic colleagues have said they are not yet able to find a Democrat to object, although my understanding is they intend to. I hope they reconsider that.

A terrific ending for today’s debate would be passing the SHAME Act and saying: We are all standing together against forced abortions and grotesque human rights violations. Maybe that will happen. Maybe it won’t. But let’s find out where we are on the question of the SCRIPT Act.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAWLEY). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I think we have gone a little bit far afield from the six pro-democracy activists living abroad.

Mr. CRUZ. If the Senator from Connecticut—I have not yet yielded the floor. I am about to ask unanimous consent, so—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 3835 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that this bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object on the SCRIPT Act, which I understand is the only measure so far on which the Senator from Texas is seeking unanimous consent, very simply, he knows, I know, we all know that measure will never reach the President’s desk. There is simply no way it can pass both Houses of Congress in the next few days before the end of this Congress.

The only way we can do something for the freedom fighters and democracy

advocates in Communist China is to pass this measure that he has objected to, which has unanimously passed the House of Representatives. Only H.R. 8428 offers that opportunity, and frankly, only this measure that he has objected to does anything for the dissidents or the democracy advocates or the freedom fighters directly.

He is talking about movies; we are talking about human lives. He can draw all the kinds of hypothetical connections between the so-called movie moguls in Hollywood and China, but I think his SCRIPT Act actually works against the goal that he is advocating.

Censorship in China is a legitimate concern, no question about it, and I would welcome the opportunity to work with him on a bill that does something about it. But actually his bill not only takes away the support for the movies that may be made; it takes away support for documentaries about the repressive regime in China, and it takes away classification and other security screening that are necessary for those kinds of movies to be shown in this country. I think that kind of obstacle may be inadvertent on his part. But I welcome the chance to work with him on a bipartisan bill, a truly bipartisan bill that, in fact, in the next Congress could reach the President's desk. This one that he is offering, the SCRIPT Act, goes nowhere.

But I just want to bring us back to the reality that really is at issue here. Just last Wednesday afternoon of this week, two of the activists among the six pro-democracy fighters living abroad, charged under China's new national security law, were before our committee. I am wondering what they are thinking when they hear my colleague from Texas pounding the table about being tough on China but objecting to a bill that guarantees them protection. As I say, I am talking about their lives and tens of thousands of others. I am not talking about movies. I am not talking about Hollywood moguls.

Let's stand up for the lives of those Chinese Hong Kong freedom fighters now in this country seeking protection through a bill passed unanimously by the House of Representatives—the only bill that will go to the President's desk if we approve it.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Three brief observations: No. 1, the Senator from Connecticut said multiple times that the House bill in question passed the House unanimously. I am sure this is inadvertent, but what the Senator from Connecticut said is simply wrong. It passed the House by voice vote, which is a very different thing from passing unanimously. It simply means the vote tally was not recorded.

Secondly, the Senator from Connecticut said the SCRIPT Act is not going to pass this Congress. Well, that appears to be correct, but that is for one reason and one reason only, which is the final two words uttered by the Senator from Connecticut: "I object."

Quite literally by doing nothing, quite literally by giving the identical speech he had just given and then closing his mouth before those final two words—had that occurred, the SCRIPT Act would have passed this body unanimously.

So the only reason the SCRIPT Act isn't passing is because the Senate Democrats are objecting. And it should not be lost on anybody that the Hollywood billionaires who are enriching themselves with this Chinese propaganda are among the biggest political donors to today's Democratic Party in the entire country.

The Senator from Connecticut said: Well, the SCRIPT Act might make it possible to have documentaries on the human rights abuses in China. Oh, really. That argument staggers the mind. It so defies reality because—you know what—Hollywood doesn't make movies about the human rights abuses in China.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to meet Richard Gear. Now, Richard Gear is not someone you would ordinarily imagine palling around with a conservative Republican from Texas, but Richard Gear was up here. He was up here actually standing up against Chinese abuses and urging anyone who would listen—Republican or Democrat—to stand with him.

Do you know Richard Gear has not made a single major Hollywood movie in a decade? Why? Because he dared stand with Tibet, and the Hollywood billionaires blackballed Richard Gear. If you speak out for Tibet, if you do what the Senator from Connecticut just suggested and discuss the Chinese human rights abuses—it doesn't matter that Richard Gear used to be an A-list Hollywood blockbuster actor—boom—his career is dead because no studio will produce a movie with him because he spoke the truth.

By the way, my bill presents zero barriers to someone actually making a documentary on the human rights abuses in China because, presumably, if you are making that documentary, you wouldn't allow the Chinese Communist Government to censor it.

I don't know what kind of documentaries the Senator from Connecticut is familiar with, but I am not familiar with documentaries done on tyrants and concentration camps where you let the concentration camp guards edit out the stuff they don't like. That ain't a documentary.

The Senator from Connecticut said perhaps we can work together in a bipartisan manner to address this. I hope so. Standing together against the oppression of the Chinese Communists would be a very good thing for the U.S. Senate. It would be a very good thing

for our country. Unfortunately, at least today, that hasn't yet happened.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, the only ones happy with the outcome of today's debate are the Chinese Government. I regret this outcome because there probably was a time when we would have cooperated in a bipartisan way on both of these matters.

It may not have been unanimous. There may have been a few contrary votes in the House, but clearly it came here with bipartisan support, and I regret that the outcome today is not bipartisan agreement to protect those freedom fighters who came before the Judiciary Committee and who have risked their lives.

This issue is not going away. We will be back because, fortunately, the activists from Hong Kong will persist in their fight, and we ought to do everything we can to make sure they have a safe haven in this country and that they are protected here.

So my closing plea to my colleague from Texas is that maybe there remains time, even in this setting, but, if not, we need to take a stand as a nation against Chinese censorship, against repression by the Chinese, and come together and work together. I thank the chairman.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, the first thing I want to do is comment on the discussions we just had.

I have been up here a little less than 2 years, and the thing that surprises me is, invariably, the Democrats won't stand up against the Communist Party in China.

The case that we are dealing with now is they are going to stand up for Hollywood rather than rights, rights that we have here that I am going to talk about in a second.

We ought to be standing up against Communist China stealing our jobs, our technology. We ought to be attacking the Communist Party for what they have done to Uighurs, for organ harvesting, for taking away the basic rights of Hong Kong citizens.

Invariably, I watch my Democratic colleagues; they won't stand up against Communist China. I don't understand it. This is a party that clearly wants to dominate our society, our way of life. They completely disagree with our way of life.

I want to thank Senator TED CRUZ for his continued fight for rights, for all the rights that we have in this country but fighting for those rights so people, whether in Hong Kong or in Communist China or in Taiwan, have the same freedoms that we have.

So I want to thank Senator TED CRUZ for showing up today and doing this.

Mr. CRUZ. Thank you.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. RES. 806

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, today what I want to talk about is religious freedom. Religious liberty is our

first freedom under the Constitution of the United States. Americans have the right to freely exercise religion, a sacred right that I will always fight for.

There is no pandemic exception to the First Amendment. Unfortunately, we have seen liberal Governors and mayors across the country use the coronavirus pandemic to go after churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship. For months, they have argued that houses of worship should not meet and congregants could not sing. They have condemned in-person worship services as a threat to public safety, all while they applaud massive political protests.

We saw it happen right here in the Nation's Capital. Mayor Bowser refused to grant a waiver to the Capitol Hill Baptist Church for religious gatherings but supported mass protests that violated her own orders. The church had to sue the city in Federal court for the right to gather, and the court ruled in favor of the church.

It is simply hypocritical and unconstitutional to target religious institutions while letting other businesses operate. We know those on the left will take every opportunity to infringe on Americans' First Amendment rights, but we won't let it happen.

This year has been challenging, and for many of us, our faith and our communities have helped us through it. Government doesn't have the right to take this away from American citizens.

I am proud to lead a resolution today with 15 of my colleagues to call out those who have wrongly tried to prevent Americans from practicing their faith. This is about rights granted to Americans under our Constitution.

What is the one thing every American believes in and has agreed to uphold. It is our Constitution, which we have each sworn to uphold as elected officials also.

We each took the same oath of office:

I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.

There is no reason anyone should object to upholding our Constitution. I will always fight for the religious liberty of all Americans, and I look forward to my colleagues passing this important resolution today.

However, I now am going to wait because I understand one of my Democratic colleagues is going to come object to upholding the Constitution and the First Amendment, the Bill of Rights. This is shocking to me.

As if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 806, submitted earlier today; further, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to re-

consider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, my colleague Senator SCOTT has chosen an interesting point in this pandemic to object to public safety measures intended to protect human life and ensure scarce resources are not squandered.

Over 17 million Americans—17 million—have contracted COVID, that we know of, and over 300,000 of our friends and our neighbors and loved ones are no longer with us. Think about that.

September 11 was a great national tragedy. I know because I lost 700 of those 3,000 citizens, on that fateful day, from New Jersey. This is 100 times more than what happened on September 11.

The people we have lost are not just some nameless numbers but mothers and fathers and grandparents. Essential parts of our hearts are gone forever due to a pandemic that has been mishandled and mismanaged from the start. And now, when this virus is running unchecked through our communities, we have before us this resolution that is riddled with misstatements of fact that I find deeply concerning.

No Governor wants to see their constituents cut off from their daily lives, and I think we can all agree that the administration here in Washington—their inability to guide us through this crisis—has left our Governors holding the bag when it comes to securing resources, providing guidance, and making the difficult calls about the right public policy to prevent COVID-19 from rampaging like an unchecked bull in a China shop through our States because they know, the Governors of our States, that the lives of their residents—our neighbors, brothers, sisters, children, and parents—rest in their hands and these difficult decisions they must make.

We are still losing Americans from COVID-19 at an unprecedented rate. Hospitals throughout the country are providing an amazing level of care with exhausted providers and continued resource issues. And our economy is cratering because we cannot fully reopen it until it is safe.

I am deeply troubled to see a false claim about my State and the Governor banning indoor religious services. Let me be clear, houses of worship were never ordered closed—never. In fact, today, religious gatherings are allowed to have substantially higher capacity limits than most other gatherings.

While New Jersey restricted the capacity of indoor religious services, as they did with all indoor gatherings, religious gatherings were never—never—designated as nonessential or essential, as this resolution suggests. That distinction was only applied to retail businesses.

Perhaps religion is different in Florida, but our houses of worship are not

retail businesses. Houses of worship and religious organizations have been subject to neutral restrictions that equally burden religious and nonreligious entities. They were put in place to do what? To save lives, not under the guise of doing so and certainly not for the purpose of targeting religious groups.

I am a man of strong faith and conviction. I have always found deep solace in the rituals and shared worship of my church. I know many of us have. But perhaps the most important part of my faith is the duty, the responsibility to care for my neighbors up and down the State of New Jersey and all across the Nation. Our faith calls us to ensure the health and safety of this Nation before all else.

As a matter of fact, I am reminded of a passage in the Bible of James 2:14. It says:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and get your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

As for me, I will continue to work for the people of New Jersey, our healthcare workers struggling to care for the thousands filling ICU hospital beds, for the families who don't know how they will pay next month's rent and keep food on the table, for the small business owner trying to keep his doors open, and, yes, for the churches that want the see their parishioners safe. I, however, do not intend to play these partisan games. For those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, freedom of religion shouldn't be controversial. This is a fundamental right of our Nation, as stated in our Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

What this resolution says is that the Senate affirms its support for the rights, liberties, and protections enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

There is no pandemic exception to the First Amendment. For months, across this country, liberal politicians have targeted churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship. To let this happen undermines the principle of our Nation and the Constitution we have each sworn to uphold as elected officials. I don't understand why my colleague, who swore to uphold the Constitution, would object to a resolution that simply reaffirms our commitment to upholding the Constitution.

We are blessed to live in a great nation that respects religious liberty and

the right to worship, especially as we see countries around the world like Communist China and Iran deny their citizens these same rights. Americans have the right to worship, and government doesn't get to decide for them.

I am clearly very disappointed that my colleague doesn't want to protect the First Amendment, but I will continue to stand against these misguided and hypocritical attempts to target religious institutions. I am never going to stop fighting for the religious liberty of all Americans, even during a pandemic.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I know that my colleague, I understand, is going to be the next chair of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, and he has every right to do that, but what he has no right to do is misrepresent in this resolution what, at least in my State, is going on.

You cannot say that churches were designated by the State of New Jersey as nonessential or essential. That simply is not true. It is simply not true. You cannot suggest that somehow these purposes are to target religions. They are to save lives.

Now, maybe if my colleague and others here had spoken up when the administration was asleep at the switch as this pandemic was raging, maybe if my colleagues had spoken up when we found out that the President knew back in January, early February of this year, of how vicious this pandemic could be, how contagious it could be, how it was transmitted, but said nothing to the American people—and that silence was echoed in this Chamber—well, maybe then we wouldn't be in the position that we are in. Maybe we wouldn't have lost 300,000 of our fellow Americans.

So I find it really, really upsetting that, in the midst of a raging pandemic, one would seek to obtain a political value out of something that is simply not the case—simply not the case. I think there is a lot more to be done in this Chamber to stop this pandemic, to stop more lives from being lost, to save our brothers and sisters, to help those who have been ravaged by the pandemic, but not to pick a few States that happen to be Democratic—please.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT. So if my colleague from New Jersey's concern is the paragraph numbered 4 on page 3, I would ask him if he would object if we just take that paragraph out and then he would be willing to affirm that the Senate believes in religious freedom.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. The resolution is replete with inaccuracies, and, therefore, I will continue to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Let's remember, the concern was that he didn't like the section about New Jersey and said that was inaccurate, but the idea that the Senate will support religious freedom, he is not willing to stand behind. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). The Senator from Michigan.

CORONAVIRUS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, we truly don't have any time to waste. The American people are in desperate need of help. And I want to start by thanking all of my colleagues who have been working so hard together across the aisle to bring us to a point where we can actually provide some help, albeit temporary, to the American people. So, thank you, and I am pleased to have been involved in elements of that negotiation and appreciate it.

But we are stuck right now, and I just want to remind people of a few numbers. More than one in three American adults in a recent survey said they are struggling to pay household expenses, including rent and mortgage. If we don't get something done in the next hours or days, we are going to see thousands of people in Michigan lose their homes in the middle of the winter.

There are 7.8 million Americans who have fallen into poverty since June—7.8 million people have fallen into poverty since June. The number of people applying for unemployment keeps rising. There were 885,000 people who filed initial claims last week, and thousands and thousands and thousands of people who are self-employed, who are contract workers, and others, will find themselves with zero support right after Christmas, unless we take action.

A recent survey found that one in four small businesses are in danger of closing if the economic conditions don't improve—one out of four. I have talked to so many friends, so many people in Michigan, vibrant small businesses—they put it all on the line for that business they always wanted to have—and now they are barely holding on. They need help, and they needed help before now. They need help now. They are waiting and waiting and waiting and holding their breath.

Up to 50 million Americans are struggling to feed their families right now. One out of four American households have experienced food insecurity in this last year—so one out of four households. People who volunteer at the food bank and people who have always contributed to the food bank now find themselves waiting in their car for hours and hours for a box of food in the United States of America. We not only have a health pandemic; we have a hunger crisis going on, and people need help now.

On top of that, this past Wednesday, 3,638 Americans died in 1 day of coronavirus, and we are now looking at government services shutting down in less than 12 hours—the backdrop of everything that is happening for Ameri-

cans. And despite all the good work that has been going on, on a bipartisan basis, we are now looking at less than 12 hours of services for people and to our country shutting down.

And why? Because my colleague, the Republican Senator from Pennsylvania, thinks it is more important to take away the Federal Government's ability to help people and help businesses and create jobs than it is to actually help people. Now, I want to say, Senator TOOMEY and I had a wonderful hearing this week in our HELP Subcommittee on Finance, of which he chairs, and we have been working together doing really important, meaningful things on Alzheimer's disease, and I very much enjoyed doing that. But on this issue—on this issue, at this time, with so many people in pain and so much hardship at this moment—I don't understand when he said that preventing the next Treasury Secretary and the Federal Reserve from relaunching the emergency credit facilities that support manufacturers and other job providers is “the most important thing” in this COVID-19 package. Really? Really? The most important thing in this package is to take away the tools of the Treasury and the Federal Reserve that have been used when we are in crisis, and we need to be a backstop for our businesses in the credit market, when we need to be supporting job providers and jobs? Really? Really? That is the most important thing?

Tell that to a mom who is afraid her kids will end up on the street because she can't pay her rent in January, which is what, 2 weeks away. Tell that to the small business owner who is having to lay off their entire staff a week before Christmas. Tell that to a senior citizen who is risking his health by waiting in an hours-long line to get a box of food. Tell that to the healthcare workers who are literally putting their lives on the line right now fighting this pandemic.

Really? Taking away economic tools from the Treasury and the Fed are more important than people in our country? Small businesses? Farmers, who have been hanging on? Really?

Tell that to the thousands of American families who are preparing for their first holiday without loved ones who have been lost to the virus. Just yesterday, another loss in Michigan—so many losses, thousands of losses—but a dear friend, a sheriff of Wayne County, Benny Napoleon, his family, today, a funeral for a friend as well in Detroit.

So the most important thing is not supporting families, is not helping people at least get through the winter, at least get through the next several months to put food on the table and a roof over their heads and help their businesses and make sure the vaccines can be distributed and support our healthcare workers and put money into education and all the other things that are needed right now—the most important thing is to have a fight with the